

John Clifford is GA president



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Our faith is our shared spiritual quest'

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

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Cover John and Barbara Clifford with their family. Photo by Roy Clark

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IFRC photo by Carl Wetham

Nepal – A disaster unfolds

Everybody, I'm sure, has been moved by the effects of the earthquakes in Nepal and we already know that this is a disaster of major proportion in a country which is so very poor and remote. The toll of death, injury and homelessness rises by the day.

Immediately after the first quake, the Executive Committee issued an appeal to Unitarians everywhere to contribute to the relief effort through the Red Cross. We hope that we can at least equal the £20,000 raised for the Philippines Typhoon appeal.

The Red Cross are desperately in need of blankets, tents and kitchen equipment to help those who have survived. A donation of £21.90 will buy 10 blankets; £14.50 buys a basic kitchen set for 5 people; £282 buys a tent for a family of 5 people. It will take a long time for the Nepalese people to recover from the worst earthquake in 81 years.

As Unitarians, I hope we can, in some small part, help this country in a time of desperate need and to show once again that a just and loving world needs Unitarianism. It needs our gifts of labour, love, and money. Without these, our vision can neither go out into the world, nor help to change it.

The President of the General Assembly, Rev John Clifford said '3,000 and counting: Natural Disasters occur all too frequently in our world and the Earthquake in Nepal has not only killed many and made more homeless, this quake has destroyed large parts of their cultural heritage and infrastructure. The need is great and urgent; as your president I urge you to contribute to the international relief effort through our Clara Barton account with the Red Cross.'

Donations by cheque should be sent to
Laura Deacon

British Red Cross,
44 Moorfields, London, EC2Y 9AL

Cheques should be made payable to **British Red Cross** with '**Clara Barton Nepal Appeal**' clearly marked on the back,

Alternatively, follow the link on the national Unitarian website (www.unitarian.org.uk) or go directly to <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/team/UnitarianChurches> so that you can donate online.

– Robert Ince, convenor, Executive Committee of the Unitarian General Assembly



With thanks

This full-colour issue of *The Inquirer* was sponsored by the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

What do you love about our faith?

(Excerpt from John Clifford's address on accepting the GA presidency.)

We open by lighting a candle on a special Welsh Oak chalice which I have had for many years and which I intend to bring with me on every official visit. These words are adapted from those circulated by International Council of Unitarians and Universalists in November 2014 as part of their monthly offerings to congregations around the world:

We light our chalice flame to start our worship period. The light represents our unending search for truth; the heat represents the warmth of love; the beauty of the lighted chalice represents our religious quest to bring the best into our lives and our world.

Just as the candle is consumed, so too we will only be able to bring truth and love and beauty into our lives and into our world by transforming into sacred flames – a sacrifice of self that is fed by the spirit of God acting through our lives and our relationships.

May our sharings and reflections help to make our inner lights burn more brightly, bringing the light of justice to our darkened world.

A Person Will Worship Something

A person will worship something—have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts—but it will out.

That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and character.

Therefore, it behoves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

In the coming year I'll be visiting many of you in your districts and congregations, hoping to hear about *your* situations and *your* hopes. I am looking forward to meeting as many of you as practical. This will not be idle curiosity, for I firmly believe theology and history are as much about people as they are about ideas.

The Vision process initiated by the Unitarian General Assembly's Executive Committee involved several of us playing with themes and creating images about our hopes for our faith community and its leadership. (The booklet created from this process is available on the national website: www.unitarian.org.uk/news/vision-our-future)

So with this context I want to ask a question: What do you really *love* about our faith? Not what do you *think* about Unitarianism; what do you *love* about us? I'm sure that for most of us it isn't bickering committee meetings or preparing a report that few will read and fewer appreciate, so what *do* you love enough that you want to share it, to nurture it, to make it flower in your life and impact other peoples' lives for good? What is the hook that pulls you to commit time, energy, resources, perhaps even money to make our faith more effective in people's lives?

In our liberal religious community, our Faith is our shared spiritual quest rather than our common answers; our quest, based on our covenant with each other to the disciplines of honesty, respect, and equality. Rationality ... yes, but not exclusively because faith is about so much more than our brains. Our spirits need beauty and poetry and music as much as they need clear thinking. But whatever our personal spiritual journey, if we don't find some way to actually work towards



John Clifford accepts the president's medallion from Marion Baker. Photo by Roy Clark

the equality we hope for, our Vision, our faith is empty and our leadership in vain. As the writer of the Epistle of James said, Faith without Works is dead.

I speak for a moment as an immigrant to these islands, possibly the first immigrant to be elected as our president. Migration is turning into a key social and political debate, not just in the UK but in much of the world. Let us steadfastly refuse the temptation to demonise the poor attempting to better their family's ability to survive; or the refugee for being homeless and out of work. It may be difficult to have sensible border controls that are fair and equitable, but not impossible. Never forget that it is the poorest and most exploited who bear the burden of the mistakes of political elites whose motives are based on power and greed.

And within all exploited communities the women suffer the most. Our almost universal blindness to the exploitation of women of all ages in all countries causes uncountable human misery. Oh sure, we can take a small bow for opening up our ministry and governance to women and for being part of the generations-long struggle to build larger visions of equality, but only a small bow because even we don't seem to be able to get organised enough to put in place proper safe-guards for vulnerable people.

Human equality and justice cannot succeed until they focus on the way we treat women; and the way women are treated is not going to change until we change the way we look at our humanity and at our challenges. And so we come back to our Vision: the way we look at our ministry to a suffering world; the way we look at our leadership; the way we motivate and inform ourselves as we attempt to implement Khalil Gibran's beautiful words: 'When you love, do not say that God is in your heart, but that you are in the heart of God.'

As hymn number 170 in 'Hymns for Living' says, echoing RW Emerson:

*Since what we choose is what we are,
And what we love we yet shall be,
The goal may ever shine afar –
The will to reach it makes us free.*

The Rev John Clifford is the 2015-16 president of the Unitarian General Assembly.

New president

Internationalist and lover of gizmos

(An excerpt from the address Andrew Hill nominating John Clifford to the GA presidency.)

When I first experienced John Clifford leading worship he would wear one of those cover-all/zip-up, floor-to-neck blue American academic gowns such that one had absolutely no idea whether he had anything on underneath or not! But then he went from the sublime to the ridiculous and became the first minister in Britain to be wearing nothing special at all when taking a service but one of those stoles or preaching scarves imported from across the Atlantic which everyone, apart from me, now seems to be wearing.

There are a host of things which make John unique among British Unitarian ministers: for a start – the obvious – he wears a kilt, a dress style that he adopted from his love of Scottish country dancing. ‘Are you Mr Clifford from Glasgow?’ someone asked him when changing planes in an obscure Indian airport. But to continue:

- He’s American by birth – Chicago
- Christian Scientist by nurture and
- Universalist by conversion;
- Educated in maths in the desert heat of Arizona
- In ministry in the ice and snows of Boston – he must now be the sole surviving alumnus of Crane Theological School at Tufts University
- And in theology in the glitz and glamour of Claremont in California.

More recently he gained a degree in computer science at Sheffield.

John’s ministry has been uniquely split between pastoral and administrative modes. When I first heard about John – it was in the early 1970s – when he was minister of the Avon Group of churches. My mother had met him somewhere and would pass on to me Midland Union gossip. But then John shifted first to Dundee and shortly afterwards to Glasgow while I transferred from Liverpool to Edinburgh and thereafter our lives and careers have somehow been inescapably tangled.

John has always been a confirmed internationalist – he speaks competent German – and in 1985 was appointed to the staff of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) in Offenbach. That’s when the Hill family home in Edinburgh became John’s British post box. Time and again we had messages – please will you take in such and such? (We lived in a big house.) Well, after three years the Clifford family all returned to live in Edinburgh while John got a job at Essex Hall first as information officer and then as the Assembly’s deputy general secretary. But this raised a logistical problem. Where, in London, was John to stay midweek? I hardly know about Monday through Thursday but on Sunday and Friday nights his bed was an upright seat on the overnight Edinburgh-London-Edinburgh coach. Then after a brief two-year interval back in the pastoral ministry in Barbara’s south Wales, John was finally appointed Executive Secretary of the International Council of Unitarian and Universalists – a post which he held for four years finally retiring in 2009.

John has always been a keen upholder of civil liberties and, at one time, was a very active supporter of the Scottish



The Rev Ernest Baker, Barbara Clifford and John Clifford listen to Andrew Hill’s speech nominating John as the next president of the Unitarian General Assembly. Photo by Roy Clark

Council for Civil Liberties. Consequently, when, in more recent years he found himself appointed as a member of our General Assembly’s Executive Committee – sadly not by popular vote but by default – John, like many of us, was much concerned by this failure of our denominational democracy. He is retiring now from that default capacity but will be returning to the Executive for one more year according to the recent provision that the President attends meetings in order to facilitate communication between the EC and its constituency, a situation which I would encourage John to fully exploit.

Finally, during his years into and out of Edinburgh John was a loyal attender and member and supporter of St Mark’s – he and Barbara were married there. So St Mark’s appointed him as honorary associate minister with a letter of appointment saying that he received no pay! He became involved appropriately for his training occasionally leading worship and in 2003 was the General Assembly’s Anniversary preacher in the specially re-decorated St. Mark’s – the last time the service was held in one of our churches. But it is another occasion which I remember with greater affection. John loves gizmos. He had one of those novel little Psion pocket computer things. They were about the size of a modern smart phone. And, always a pioneer, John had his sermon notes and the text of everything else all in it. And guess what? Mid-flow it all vanished. I’m afraid I howled with laughter.

Well, this is the person who will be our President for the next 12 months. John and Barbara love travelling. It doesn’t matter how far or how inconvenient – they’ll get there. He will be a splendid choice as president and, on your behalf, I wish him and Barbara well for their coming year.

The Rev Andrew Hill is a retired Unitarian minister.

PAP: Immigration myths and reality

By Bruce Chilton

It really makes no sense to believe the myths about immigration to the UK. Most are hostile to immigrants and, if based on facts, those facts are usually startlingly exceptional.

There are certainly many facts about immigration read in newspapers, heard on TV and radio and from friends and neighbours. But are these facts ones on which you can rely to form sensible views about such an important subject?

Immigration is certainly an important subject. About 70% of UK residents, according to reliable surveys by the Ipsos-Mori Social Research Institute, consider immigration to be a major national concern. Ironically, when UK residents are asked if they see immigration as a personal or local concern, this large figure tumbles to about 20%. Why?

It was questions on immigration like this which the Penal Affairs Panel members put to the small and lively audience of 40 delegates at the GA session. The PAP used a major study published in 2014, "Perception and Reality: Public Attitudes to Immigration" by Bobby Duffy and Tom Frere-Smith, senior researchers at the Ipsos-Mori Social Research Institute. The study shows large gaps between the beliefs of UK residents and reliable facts about immigration. An obvious example is what proportion of the population do UK residents think were born outside of the UK. Ipsos-Mori and other surveys have found the UK public estimates 32% but the national Census in 2011 found about 12.1%. Why are UK attitudes so far from reality?

Why are people's answers to surveys so different from facts such as results of the Census? Do they understand the questions? What, for example, is "concern" about immigration? "Concern" might mean "a problem" or "an opportunity". Ipsos-Mori asked this question and found 64% of the UK residents with "concern" about immigration see it as a problem while 29% see it more as an opportunity. Framing the questions can make a big difference to the answers.



Dawn Buckle, of the Dukinfield congregation was made an honorary member of the General Assembly of Unitarians for her many years of voluntary service to the movement. Photo by Roy Clark

When residents in Germany were asked the same question about "a problem" or "an opportunity", their answers, 34% a problem and 62% an opportunity, were almost the exact reverse of UK residents. Why are UK residents so much more hostile to immigration? The discussion among the GA delegates was lively. Is it because the UK is an island nation? Is it a result of German conditions after 1945?

Another problem for researchers is exaggeration, amounting to so-called "emotional innumeracy". Some UK residents may be trying to express their concern about immigration as much as trying to get a right answer. When the researchers offer rewards for correct answers, the answers are much more accurate.

The PAP considers the views of UK residents about immigrants very worrying when almost 10,000 immigrants are in UK prisons awaiting deportation and about 3,400 refugees and asylum-seekers are held in prison conditions.

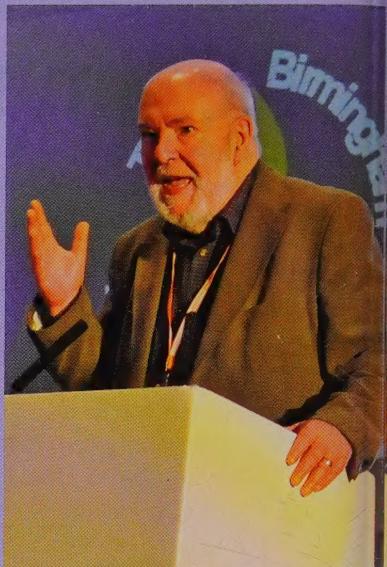
When asked to estimate the proportion of refugees and asylum-seekers among immigrants each year, UK residents gave Ipsos-Mori surveys average estimates ranging from 62% in 2011 and 21% in 2013. These answers are wrong by factors of 9 and 3. The real figure is 7%. By far the biggest proportion of immigrants to the UK in 2014 and 2015 are workers heading to jobs. Many such jobs are vital to the UK economy such as plant operatives, health professionals and in research for new products.

There is one outstanding concern mentioned by people who see immigration as a problem. Abuse of benefits/burden on public services ranks much higher than other concerns at about 45%. This concentration by UK residents on economic matters hardly fits the facts. The age profile of migrants makes it probable they will be net contributors. The UK avoids having to educate working age adults. The increase in working adults lowers the "dependency ratio" between workers and the unemployed, including the retired. The migrants pay strongly towards the benefits and pensions for the natives.

When the UK people are so hostile to immigration, it seems odd that Ipsos-Mori finds UK people are much more positive about the contribution of immigrants to making the UK a better place to live. The reasons must lie in how UK residents experience as well as perceive immigration. Ipsos-Mori found Community tension/lack of integration to be almost the lowest concern of UK people. How do the migrants feel about integration or "values convergence"? How much do immigrants feel they belong to Britain compared with the native born? The Ipsos-Mori study finds the two groups feel almost the same. Recent immigrants have a lower sense of belonging. But the longer-term immigrants have a much stronger sense of belonging, even stronger than the natives do.

Is integration by immigrants the way forward out of the dangers of the UK's myths and misunderstandings about immigration? How can Unitarians help to stop the dangers? Could calling for "adaptation" by all people be a better answer? One of the other sessions at the GA was "Intercultural Competency" given by the Rev Jill McAllister, of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists and GA Keynote speaker, about helping communication and cross-education between people of different cultures. It sounds like a good start but that is another article.

Bruce Chilton is a member of the Penal Affairs Panel.



General Assembly 2015



Clockwise from top left: Meals were a good time to catch up with friends; the Rev Bill Darlison makes a point; EC Convenor Robert Ince introduces the new book on our Unitarian Vision; the dance floor was packed during the social evening; the Rev Anna Jarvis spoke during a worship celebration organised by the new ministers and lay pastor; the Rev Winnie Gordon and Angela Maher had a catch-up; the Rev John Midgley displayed the newcomers' 'wrap', available from 'The Inquirer'; Kate Dean helped lead an intergenerational session; Stella Burney at the Nightingale Centre stall; the banner parade provided colour and inspiration; the swing singers were a popular feature at the social evening. Photos by Roy Clark





Unitarian Gener

PRAYER for the General Assembly

Ineffable spirit of life and love, divine presence of many names, and of none.

We aspire to know and feel your presence in our midst, in our gathering together.

We are joined in meeting together:

- to seek each other's wisdom in bearing our liberal religious witness;
- to measure our last year's endeavour and our future hope;
- to feel the strength of our wider fellowship;
- to be inspired in our commitment;
- to enjoy friendly social contact;
- to have our fallible perceptions challenged.

We have our convictions, our sense of what is right, may we in humility be prepared to accept that however reasonable they may be wrong, or skewed;

May we be generous in our listening, and compassionate when we are reminded of our failings;

Be with us in all our deliberations, in our dismay at what we see, and in our delight in finding what is right;

Be with us in our offering of skill and experience;



Nurturing Faith • Embracing Diversity

Assembly 2015

... our passions;
not that our perspectives,
however passionately held,

see blind error,
o-human limitations.

share our vision.

, hard work and time.

May we go away from our gathering refreshed and renewed,
determined that our precious worshipping communities shall
persist in an often-uncomprehending world;
determined to offer in service and patience
the best that we may be.

In our concern for the world in which we live,
at this time, and the failings which seem to besoil it,
We seek the wisdom to recognise that which stands the test of being
eternally holy.

So may it be.

– *The Rev Ernest Baker*



life • Celebrating Difference

Assembly passed 5 out of 6 motions

The Unitarian General Assembly passed all but one of the resolutions proposed this year.

Resolution 1 was proposed by Cross Street Chapel, Manchester and called on Unitarians to study the proposed Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership (TTIP) treaty and take action against it. The motion notes that TTIP will give power to unelected corporations and 'would likely impact unfairly on many of the poorest in societies across the globe.' Vote tally – For: 124, Against: 1, Abstentions: 28

Resolution 2 was proposed by the Executive Committee and made Dawn Buckle an honorary member of the General Assembly.

Passed

Resolution 3, also proposed by the Executive Committee, congratulates the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists on its 20th anniversary.

Passed

Resolution 4, proposed by Golders Green Unitarians and 12 full members of the assembly calls on Unitarians to support the Universal Kinship Fund of the Dr Hadwen Trust and other humane research charities in order to advance non-animal medical research and in so doing help save human and animal lives. Vote tally – For: 125, Against: 2,

Abstentions: 3

Resolution 5, proposed by Westgate Chapel, Wakefield, calls on the Executive Committee to establish recommendations for payment of organists and others who provide musical services to congregations. Vote tally – For: 71, Against: 42, Abstentions: 17

A motion proposed by St Albans Unitarians calling on the Executive Committee to establish a programme to develop better community cohesion did not pass.

Vote tally – For 8, Against: 114, Abstentions: 16

– MC Burns



Psychical society hears love never dies

By Feargus O'Connor

At the turn of the Millennium several biologists, neurologists, sociologists, philosophers and representatives of the caring professions were brought together at a conference entitled *Empathy, Altruism and Agape* at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for a serious academic study of love. This inspirational and far-sighted initiative led to an impressive flowering of scholarship, sometimes referred to as the 'love, science and theology symbiosis', and this was, significantly, followed by Karen Armstrong's Charter for Compassion. More than 50 major scientific research projects have been funded and various research centres established. Dr Mark Fox's lecture and book *The Fifth Love: Exploring Accounts of the Extraordinary* are inspired by and follow on in that tradition. In his latest book Dr Fox analyses more than 150 previously unpublished experiences suggestive of a distinct type of spiritual experience characterised by overwhelming love. In his lecture at the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies session at the General Assembly he gave a selection of these cases.

Some researchers class this love as a spiritual phenomenon, and these experiences are recounted by a wide range of people of all religious affiliations and none. Many of these testimonies give moving and remarkably consistent descriptions of this core experience, evidently of a paranormal character. Some are near-death experiences, to which the author devoted a scholarly and widely acclaimed book, *Religion, Spirituality and the Near-Death Experience* (Routledge, London, 2003). According to Dr Fox, this experience is truly life changing:

having felt this all-embracing love, those touched by it are evidently spiritually transformed and fortified by the conviction that love is indeed stronger than death and that there are 'dimensions' to reality not usually felt, seen or otherwise apprehended by our physical senses.

It should be noted that all the cases Dr Fox analyses are drawn from those collected at the Religious Experience Research Centre of the University of Wales, Trinity St David, Lampeter. This archive of over 6000 spiritual and psychic experiences was originally started in 1969 by Sir Alister Hardy, FRS (1896-1985), the eminent Unitarian marine biologist, who had an interest all his adult life in spiritual phenomena and strongly believed in their rigorous scientific study.

Having earlier published *The Living Stream; A Restatement of Evolution Theory and its Relationship to the Spirit of Man* (Harper and Row, 1965), Sir Alister went on to write *The Spiritual Nature of Man: Study of Contemporary Religious Experience* (Oxford University Press, 1979), the fruit of his careful scientific analysis of the spiritual phenomena recorded in his archive, then at Manchester College, Oxford, a Unitarian foundation.

Such systematic academic study of spirituality and recorded religious experiences was pioneered by the Harvard psychologist, philosopher and psychical researcher William James, the brother of the novelist Henry James. In his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), influential at the time and a classic in its field ever since its publication, and his 1897 *Ingersoll Lecture on Human Immorality*, delivered

(Continued on next page)

Historical Society honours one of their own

By Peter Godfrey

The AGM of the Unitarian Historical Society was a particularly happy occasion. It honoured its President, Alan Ruston, by presenting him with a special edition of the Society's *Transactions*. This took the form of a Festschrift with eight 'Essays in Honour of Alan Ruston'. In handing the book to Alan, the editor, the Rev Dr David Steers, spoke of Alan's 'tremendous knowledge and ability as a communicator' and thanked him for his 25 years as editor of *Transactions* and for his wide-ranging historical work over many years. The measure of this work is revealed in the fact that the record of Alan's published writing from 1967 to 2015 takes 18 pages.

The presentation was followed by four excellent 15-minute talks. Dr Ralph Waller, Principal of Harris Manchester College Oxford where Alan has done so much work over the years, had travelled specially to speak on this occasion and, like the other speakers, to express his thanks and appreciation to Alan. His talk brought insights to the early years in the life and ministry of James Martineau. There were interesting references to Martineau's work as a schoolmaster while in Bristol, and then as assistant minister in Dublin. In Dublin in 1830 Martineau published a document on 'Peace in Division' in which he said that opponents had a duty to be honest and to remember the things they had in common and also to be aware that genuine mistakes did not lead one to be banished by God. There was reference to Martineau's important collection of hymns that included five by his sister Harriet. The compilation reflected Martineau's concern for the emotional side of religion. Dr Waller made reference to Martineau's study of German thought and his contact with German scholars, as well as the importance of his fruitful work with other young ministers when he moved to Liverpool. This talk is not in *Transactions*. It is very much to be hoped that it will be in the next one.

The three other talks were all by people attending the General Assembly meetings and each talk was related to an article in the special *Transactions*. The Rev Daniel Costley gave an illustrated talk about Edward Hammond, one of his predecessors in the ministry at Bessels Green, Sevenoaks, whose tombstone Daniel can see from his kitchen window.

Psychical Society

(Continued from previous page)

at Harvard University (and inaugurated by the Unitarian President of Harvard, Charles W Eliot) William James set the highest standards all subsequent scholars and researchers seek to emulate.

The most evidential part of Dr Fox's lecture was his use of personal accounts of near-death experiences and his lecture shows he is worthy to join those able scientific, medical and academic researchers, notably Dr Kenneth Ring, Dr Bruce Greyson, Dr Michael Sabom, Dr Melvin Morse and Dr Charles Tart in the US and Dr Margot Grey, Dr Peter Fenwick and Dr Sam Parnia in this country, who have undertaken very extensive research and published their findings in learned articles and important books following on from the pioneering studies of Raymond Moody, Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson in the 1970s.

The Rev Feargus O'Connor is minister at Golders Green Unitarians.



Alan Ruston received recognition from the Historical Society and is greeted by the Rev Dr David Steers. Photo by Roy Clark

Daniel showed how Hammond had been 'another ordinary minister, living an extraordinary life', who went from being a milliner to become a minister. Hammond died at an early age, only five days after his wife. They had typhus, probably caused by an infected drain, pipes and cesspit at the manse and church. There were seven children living with them at the time and an appeal in *The Inquirer* raised over £2500 for their support.

The Rev Dr Ann Peart talked about the remarkable life and achievements of William Gaskell. Ann outlined Gaskell's work as minister of Cross Street, Manchester, for over 55 years, and how, in addition, he had done remarkable work for Unitarianism generally and also for the city of Manchester. The celebration of his 50 years in the ministry was attended by over a thousand people. Ann raised the question of why, nowadays, Gaskell was usually referred to and known – even in Unitarian histories – as the husband of Mrs Gaskell, the novelist. Ann's answers are in her *Transactions* article.

In the final talk Dr David Wykes, librarian of Dr Williams's Library, spoke about the great difficulty of providing training for Unitarian ministers in the early years of the 19th century. Dissenting academies struggled to survive, and provision for financially poor students was difficult to obtain. The closure of academies such as Daventry and Hackney made it impossible for Manchester College alone to meet the needs of Unitarian churches many of which struggled as a result.

These talks are well worth reading fully in *Transactions*, as are the other papers in the 188-page issue – a great bargain.

The *Transactions* will be sold in the shops for £12. But it is free to members of the Unitarian Historical Society – and membership costs only £10 per annum. If you join now you will receive this special edition and this year's Supplement containing reviews and other items. If you would like to join the Society please send a cheque (payable to the Unitarian Historical Society) to the editor – David Steers, 223 Upper Lisburn Road, Belfast BT10 0LL. Or for more information see: www.unitarianhistory.org.uk/hstrans4.html

The Rev Peter Godfrey is a member of the Unitarian Historical Society.

Lots of ways to become more visible

By Bernice Lashbrook

If they didn't make it to the Visible Strategy Group workshop session at General Assembly meetings, delegates could hardly have failed to see strategy group presenter James Barry (who, somehow, manages to be in several places at the same time) walking around in a bright hand-knitted turquoise jumper (a Hill family heirloom) emblazoned with chalice flames and with the printed badges (produced by the new badge making machine) pinned all over it!

James and Diane Bennett led us through a wide variety of tools available, at relatively low prices, to enable us to promote ourselves. Corporations have tools to market their brands. We Unitarians have a good brand, and we can do likewise. There are plenty of ways of doing it step by step and without digging too deeply into our already overburdened Chapel finances.

Banners. Examples ranging from 'Pop-up'; 'Butterfly' and broad strip were displayed. Made from strong waterproof PVC and other materials, prices ranged from £27 for one example and one church had purchased 6 strip banners for £83.00. Check out www.vistaprint.co.uk or print shops in your own area for prices.

Notice boards. If you're about to replace external, worn notice boards, or have accessible glass-door-fronted boards, give as much information as you can about what the church does and important contact numbers and your website. For internal boards, design and put up in the most visible location a poster showing photographs of people in the congregation with their names. It makes visitors feel comfortable if they can link a face to the person.

Websites. Not as daunting as they sound! James and his team have the expertise and the enthusiasm to help you set up one for your Chapel based on a uniform style throughout the country. It's one of the first places a potential visitor might look. Think about what you want to say and give the details of someone to contact.

UKunitarianTV. Two film crews are now in place and will travel around the UK. They can film worship services; personal



James Barry offered ways to be a very visible Unitarian, including modelling a chalice jumper, an heirloom of the Hill family. Photo by Roy Clark

reflections; meditations; lectures and workshops. They can be included on your website and help to give potential visitors a flavour of what you do. Interestingly, films produced by UKunitarianTV have, in total, been viewed over 80,000 times on YouTube. And I'm sure James would tell you 'we've only just started to scratch the surface'!

Social media. Facebook and Twitter and, well you name it, are other ways to spread the message.

Badges. Customise badges with your own message and wear them all the time (even when shopping in the supermarket!); another way of getting the message across. Prices are 30p for small, 40p for medium and 50p for large.

Posters. You can access more than 140 different styles of Unitarian posters in Microsoft Word which can be edited to include your details and which can be downloaded from www.uccn.org/uk/wordPosters

Contact James Barry for further details on any of these services on jbarry@kyla.co.uk

Bernice Lashbrook is a member of Christ Church Unitarian Chapel, Bridgwater.

Commemorate war, witness for peace

By Sue Woolley

The Unitarian Peace Fellowship slot at the GA meetings asked, 'How can we witness for peace during commemorations for the First World War?' Two Unitarian ministers answer.

The Rev Bill Darlison started by suggesting an alternative, rather sadder, title for the session: 'How can we ever witness for peace?' He saw the primary motive for war as being financial – the money made by the arms trade. Twenty years ago, he believed that war was a racket, and that if we could just sort out the politics and economics, war would cease.

He still believes this is partly true. The point is: war is something that is in us all, and if we are to witness for peace, we need to recognise this fact. He quoted DH Lawrence: 'Why do people only make war when they say they want peace?' Peace campaigning shouldn't be an exercise for the ego.

Politics and economics cannot eliminate warlike propensities

in humankind, because the motives for war are fear and greed. As Huston Smith put it 'We can never have enough of what we don't really need.' There seems to be the constant fear that what we have will be taken away from us by some nameless enemy. This is as much a spiritual fear as anything else.

And so the solution must be spiritual. We are all flawed, but we can acknowledge and fight against our instincts and learn to control them. This is what the spiritual life is about – the gradual conquest of fear of the 'other'. We need to practice peace hourly and daily, in our personal lives, and in the world at large.

The Rev Celia Cartwright remembered watching the Remembrance Sunday ceremony on TV one year, and being overcome by the realisation that every poppy that fell represented a life lost in conflict. Somebody's brother;

(Continued on next page)

URG offered 'Any Questions?'

By John and Celia Midgley

The *Any Questions?* model of hearing and sharing ideas and opinions is a familiar one, and the Unitarian Renewal Group (URG) chose four new ministers to make up its panel. Three of them had trained at Oxford, one at Unitarian College Manchester. One of the largest audiences for a fringe meeting gathered to hear their responses to challenging questions, such as, 'What particular aspect of theology did you choose to study and why; and more importantly, how you are using the fruits of that learning to further your ministry and benefit your congregation?'

For Matthew Smith it was practical and pastoral theology. 'We start with our own lives,' he explained. For Maria Curtis it was contextual theology. 'I did a project on the Lord's Prayer with the congregation where I was on placement, in Bolton. They have it every week. That was a challenge for me, so my project asked people to share what it meant to them.'

For Jo James the focus was biblical theology, 'Because I came from an atheist background!' he added. 'My aim now is to create worship services with substance and depth.' For Kate Whyman it was biblical studies, 'Though I do not identify as a Christian, so I had to catch up quickly. But it was in-depth study, and a good discipline for me. I wanted to feel secure. We used to read our essays to each other.'



New ministers, the Revs (l-r) Kate Whyman, Jo James, Maria Curtis and Matthew Smith discussed their work. Photo by Roy Clark

Next question: 'Do you find in your local situation that you place more emphasis on interfaith or on interdenominational co-operative work?' Maria, in her first ministry in Horsham, told us that her congregation is not in Churches Together, so their focus is on the interfaith group, founded by Unitarians. Matthew has two congregations, Bury St Edmunds and Framlingham. In one, it's interfaith contacts, in the other he has good relations with the local clergy. For Kate, in Plymouth, it is interfaith relations.

Next: 'Can we learn from the success of the Sunday Assembly Movement?' described by the questioner as a godless church. Jo James smiled. 'They book into church buildings, they sing and have sermons!' Kate was happy for them to celebrate their atheism. 'We are not in competition with them. We offer doubt, not certainty.' Matthew's view was that they had started as a sort of entertainment, 'Whereas we are a much more reflective community. It's a challenge, to consider what young people want.'

'I'm in favour of anything that helps people lead better lives,' added Maria. 'But prayer is missing from what they do. I wouldn't want to lose that.'

Question master David Dawson moved the questions along faster now. 'Would you set up a variety of groups in your congregations?' Jo is trying to connect with groups that already use his premises. Maria feels a Green Spirit group would be important. Matthew is keen to begin engagement groups. 'What would they do on Easter Sunday?' someone asked. Kate had lots of ideas. 'It's a fabulous story.' Jo offered planning a sequence of services, and though Maria had dreaded her first Easter, it's all right now. 'It's all about renewal,' she said. A final question asked, 'Do you deviate from your script in a sermon?' Kate explained that she broadly sticks to her text, but will deviate with a good anecdote. Jo admitted that he deviates, 'but it doesn't always work!' Maria told us she doesn't deviate, 'But I wish I could!'

The meeting earned warm applause. All present were impressed by the seriousness and confidence of the panel. 'I admire all four of you,' said one questioner. 'We already look up to you!'

The Revs John and Celia Midgley are retired Unitarian ministers and members of the Unitarian Renewal Group.

Peace Fellowship

(Continued from previous page)

somebody's husband; somebody's son.

She decried the way in which we distance ourselves from the horrors of war by calling all service personnel 'heroes', whereas she believes that they are just ordinary people put in situations that are extraordinary. Naming them heroes enables us to distance ourselves from the amputations, the post-traumatic-stress-disorder – they happen to heroes, who can cope.

In the Kendal chapel, there is a noticeboard, and last year, members of the congregation were invited to bring along photos and other mementos of families and friends who had been caught up in the First World War. Over the months, the board was filled with shared memories – citations for bravery, medals, death notices, even love letters. Is this a witness for peace, or just remembering a past worthy of note?

She believes that the key word is 'humility' – acknowledging that we are all flawed human beings, working to try to build a world in which we can all live together. We have to be really honest in our humility, admitting our human potential for violence and judgmentalism, and take a stand against it in ourselves. We have to open our eyes to the abject terror and horror of war, which asks men and women to become killers. There is no codicil 'except for your country' in the Hebrew Bible's commandment. We need to recognise all the pain that war inflicts; it is not glorious, not about heroes. And then we need to witness for, and work for, peace.

The Rev Sue Woolley is secretary of the Unitarian Peace Fellowship.

Q&A raised subject of openness

By Andrew Bethune

Executive Committee members sat for a Q&A session at the General Assembly meetings. There were more questions than answers, but the EC members were definitely listening!

Top of the list – should EC meetings be open? The answer seems to be that meetings consist of discussions about ‘things in development’, which I take to mean that the meetings themselves aren’t really what an audience would want to observe. To balance that, EC members affirmed that they want to involve people in a discussion process. Could EC minutes be made public quicker? The minutes didn’t make the transition from the old Unitarian website to the new one. But that will be corrected shortly. They’ll also be fed out to *The Inquirer*. Could summaries be provided to congregations? Could the EC be opened up even more? The GA President now attends EC meetings as an observer, and so has a role in the communication process. I learned also that each EC member has responsibility for liaison with an area of the country.

How democratic is the EC? It was set up after consulting with experts and was voted in at a previous GA. Two EC members spoke about ‘vision’ and I was pleased that EC sees its job as inspiring people. We were urged to read the vision document, to engage with it, and comment on it. (See: www.unitarian.org.uk/news/vision-our-future) From a cursory



Betty Kenyon asks a question of EC members (l-r) Alison Thursfield, Joan Cook, Martin Whitell, Peter Hanley and Robert Ince. Photo by Roy Clark



GA Anniversary Service on Video

UKunitarianTV was pleased to film the Anniversary Service at Birmingham this year. Due to the length of the event, the film is presented in parts to make the viewing more convenient. These are also available to watch on www.ukunitarian.tv. It is hoped that those who were unable to attend will get some sense of the atmosphere of many Unitarians coming together to acknowledge the role our Ministers play followed by sharing in an act of worship.

Honouring Ministers: <https://youtu.be/w0ibGdLx1iQ>

‘Conference of the Birds’ (photo above)

<https://youtu.be/C-L6C4IvTys>

Service Pt1 with Rev Sheena Gabriel

<https://youtu.be/l50uooOakog>

Service Pt2 with Rev John Harley

<https://youtu.be/JGyE4PAoNJU>

Service Pt3 with Rev John Harley

<https://youtu.be/5rwA5OW3kCE>

– Joan Wilkinson, NUF & UKunitarianTV

glance, I can see the document being useful for congregations to explore their own visions. It was stated quite clearly that different views are expressed around the EC table, and that what the rest of us hear is the result of a vote, the end product of their discussions. The EC listens to what the rest of us are saying.

Finding volunteers to run for EC office is a problem. People lead busy lives. Jacqueline Woodman, the EC’s youngest member, said something inspiring which she’d been told by her grandmother – if you believe in a cause, you make time. She’d like to spend the next 40 years in our movement and so wants to build it. When too few candidates come forward for election, people have to be co-opted. EC doesn’t see this as anti-democratic, rather as a valuable process for looking for skills to enhance EC’s work. People can gain experience locally. For example, one EC member, who wasn’t well known nationally, was co-opted to chair his church committee when he retired, and this gave him the confidence to offer to serve on EC when a vacancy arose. The job of GA President must be a daunting one, but our outgoing president, Marion Baker, said her attendance at EC had spurred her on to offer to serve on EC. There’s not much written down about the President’s role, but is it too demanding? Is it too worship-led? Is it right to expect someone to be away from their home church every Sunday of the year?

Some EC meetings are rather long (a day and a half!) and the heavy workload may be putting volunteers off. Would having more ‘virtual’ meetings attract more volunteers? The EC isn’t of one mind about this. Already, preparation and drawing in of ideas happen by email or phone in advance of meetings. Skype probably doesn’t have the capacity for full-scale online meetings, but the UUA’s audio system seems to work. Can some work be devolved to lessen the load?

Live giving. How much do Unitarians typically give? The Quakers apparently send out a letter to all their members suggesting a minimum annual donation (£150), but they don’t have ministers to pay. The URC suggests £250 per person. Should we suggest 1% of income, or 3%? Maybe something for EC to think about.

Andrew Bethune is a member of Cambridge Unitarians.



Perhaps that's why the tablecloth is there. Derek McAuley (shown here with Marion Baker) says he and other GA staff are like ducks on water at the meetings. Calm on top but paddling furiously under the surface. Photo by Roy Clark

Behind the scenes with the chief officer

By Derek McAuley

The general response to this year's Annual Meetings has been overwhelmingly positive. With a new venue there is always some uncertainty built in despite our best efforts to plan. But everything seems to have gone off well. Someone at the meetings acknowledged that it was probably like a floating duck – all calm on the surface but legs rapidly paddling under the water out of sight. Too true. Andrew Mason, as organiser, and all the GA staff and volunteers were busy working hard behind the scenes to deliver a quality meeting.

My own highlights were:

- The Rev Jill McAllister's plenary address on the challenges posed by the global expansion of Unitarianism and Unitarian-Universalism and the work of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) over the last twenty years. It was intriguing to see how far British Unitarians played a part in establishing the international movement. Observing the excellent debate on the community cohesion issue, which saw the mood of the Meeting change as a result of the contributions. Unitarian democratic practice at its best.
- The launch of the new Executive Committee Vision Document (See: www.unitarian.org.uk/news/vision-our-future) and then the surprise of seeing its key elements forming the structure for the celebration evening led by the newly qualified ministers.
- Greeting eight new ministers at the Service of Recognition during the Anniversary Service. I doubt if I shall congratulate so many on one occasion ever again as Chief Officer. Enjoying the facilities of a 4-star hotel with meeting rooms located closely together and no need to

tramp across a university campus. It was also so easily reached by public transport.

- The tributes to Alan Ruston at the AGM of the Unitarian Historical Society with the fascinating talks drawing upon essays published in his honour in *Transactions* and learning a new word, 'Festschrift'. (*Definition: a collection of writings published in honour of a scholar – Ed.*)
- And finally, the swing music at the social evening on the final evening. We were not sure about it but the speed by which people took to the dance floor proved it to be a wise choice. However, it sets us a challenge for next year!

All who attended will have their own memories; perhaps of the worship, a particular workshop, the lovely Quiet Room set up by the Kingswood congregation or the debates. Please let us know how it went by completing a survey form. We go back to the hotel next year so it will all seem familiar but we will be thinking how we can make it new as well.

Of course, as all the attendees went home, the staff packed up the reception, exhibition, GA office and bookstall. Thanks to those who stayed to help us. The van duly arrived and was packed up by 3.10pm. Unfortunately our 4.25pm train to Euston was delayed by 45 minutes (sadly an incident on the track) and then we learned of a huge cable fire in Aldwych with no electricity in Essex Hall and traffic chaos in central London. As a result, the lift at Essex Hall was not working and we decided to go home. Isabella, Essex Hall caretaker, ably dealt with it all and we spent the rest of the week getting things back to normal.

Derek McAuley is chief officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.

Time to open up a 'can' of INTERGEN

INTERGEN – a brand new RE resource full to the brim with useful tips and ideas – was launched at the GA meetings. Here, **John Harley and Kate Dean**, two of its creators, describe what it can do for your congregation.

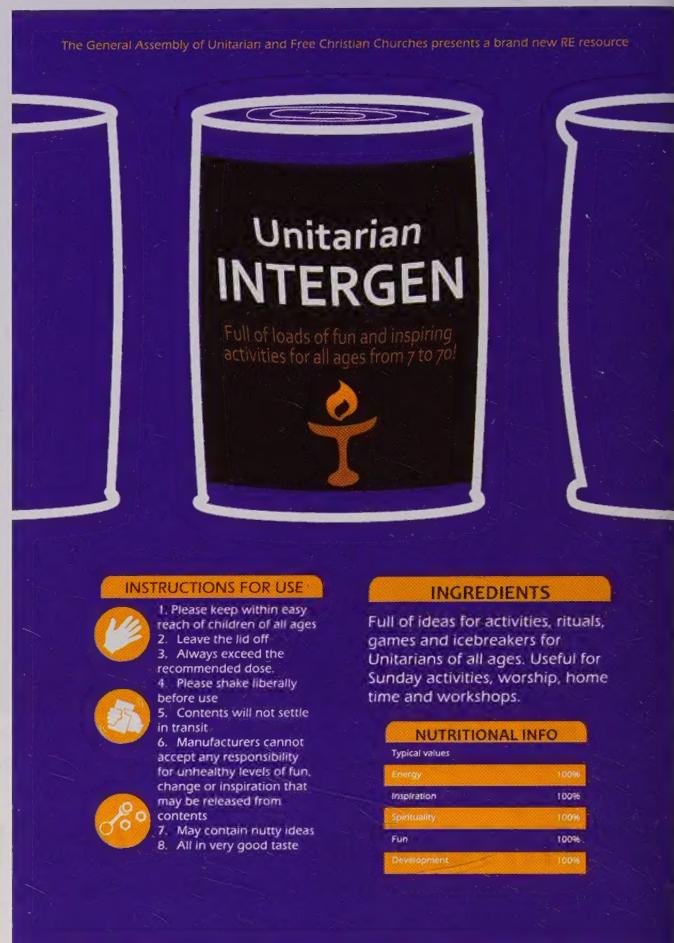
Is it full of beans, full of buttons or full of fun? Open up *Intergen* and you'll find it's...

'Full of ideas for activities, rituals and icebreakers for Unitarians of all ages. Useful for Sunday activities, worship, home time and workshops',

On the label it says: 'please keep within easy reach of children of all ages' and 'please shake liberally before use'. We urge you to buy a copy (£3 from Essex Hall) and see if this particular product lives up to its wild claims! We know how useful a printed copy is to have in your hand. Alternatively, you can download your copy from the Unitarian website.

The Rev John Harley, the Rev Lindy Latham and Kate Dean wrote this Unitarian resource in response to two phenomena occurring across our beloved movement: the sheer number of people asking for help in leading activities and worship for a diverse bunch of ages, and Bright Lights, a monthly intergenerational programme run by Bristol Unitarians. We also felt that we didn't have enough schemes of work showing how to run workshops and rituals as well as what to do.

With the support of the Local Leadership Strategy Group we got to work. We attempted to create a fully accessible



Ministry Inquiry Day



Want to know more about training as a Unitarian & Free Christian minister and about working with our congregations?

This summer the Ministry Strategy Group will be holding an Inquiry Day for people who are at an early stage of considering this possibility as well as for those who are almost ready to make an application for training. There'll be chance to meet our tutors and recent graduates.

Venue: Manchester, Cross St Chapel

Date: Thursday 6th August

Time: 11am for 11.30 start – 3.30pm finish

Booking deadline: 30th July

Advance booking is essential.

For more information and to book, please contact:

Mary-Jean Hennis at Unitarian General Assembly,
Essex Hall, 1 – 6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY

Phone: 020 7240 2384 / Email: mhennis@unitarian.org.uk

and practical resource with lots of ideas for activities and workshops and a fresh format offering tips for setting up a Bright Lights style intergenerational group or running a one off session with hardly any time to prepare. The first part of the resource gives advice about setting up a new group, using activities in Sunday school-style sessions and ideas that can be used to make worship more interactive and creative. Plus there are three 'off the shelf' session plans which you can use straight away. At the heart of the publication is a section we call 'An Aladdin's Cave of Possibilities' and we encourage you to enter and find a wide range of icebreakers and activities for all occasions. Each activity is clearly laid out showing goals, suitability, preparation, structure and safety/welfare in order to keep these ideas as easy to use as possible. *Intergen* can be used to help you plan long term RE programmes, to make worship more child- and, in fact, all-age-friendly, for home time or as a treasure store to fall back on if you need some last minute inspiration.

The resource was launched at this year's Annual Meetings where a mix of adults and kids had fun making sculptures out of bubble gum and winning some prizes!

Have you got ideas for *Intergen* activities?

We hope that this edition of *Intergen* will be just a starting point and that any of you leading groups or worship in the field will send us your own activities and ideas that you know work well. Please contact John Harley for a simple template in order to submit your idea: jharley@unitarian.org.uk

The Rev John Harley is youth co-ordinator for the Unitarian General Assembly and Kate Dean is a ministry student.